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The difference of Japanese Spa Tourists Motivation in Weekends and Weekdays

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to reveal the differences in the motivations of Japanese spa tourists on weekends as opposed to weekdays using a factor-cluster market segmentation approach. “Spas (ONSEN)” are some of the most popular tourist destinations in Japan, and tourists visit specific spa destinations to enjoy their unique qualities. In this study, we collected push motivation data from a questionnaire and separated respondents into weekend and weekday samples. The weekend and weekday motivation factors were derived from 54 motivation items through factor analysis. As a result of cluster analysis, weekend tourists were divided into three clusters and weekday tourists were segmented into four clusters. Through a comparison of the results for weekends and weekdays, we find the following. First, weekday tourists have clearer motivations than do weekend tourists. Second, both weekend and weekday tourists seek “soothing” when they travel to spas. Our results have marketing implications for spa operators: they will likely benefit from targeting their promotional strategies to the specific weekend and weekday tourist markets.

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Keywords: Tourist motivation; Segmentation; Spa destination in Japan; Weekends and weekdays

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to reveal the differences in the motivations of Japanese spa tourists on weekends as opposed to weekdays using a factor-cluster market segmentation approach. “Spas (ONSEN)” are some of the most

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popular tourist destinations in Japan. There are approximately 3,000 Japanese spa destinations that offer various benefits, such as effective health and beauty remedies, relaxation, and a serene atmosphere. Tourists visit specific spa destinations to enjoy their unique attributes. However, many spa operators do not have a full understanding of where spa tourists come from, who these tourists are,” “why they choose spa destinations from among the numerous tourist destinations,” and “what specific qualities they seek in spas.” Misui & Kamata, 2013 attempted to investigate where spa tourists come from using the Huff model. Their study provided some useful information on the origin of tourists and the market size of spa destinations.

In this study, we seek to understand why tourists choose spa destinations from among numerous tourism destinations and what particular attributes and benefits they seek in spas. These results signify the spa tourists’ motivations. We attempt to differentiate these spa tourists’ motivations on weekends versus weekdays. For this purpose, market segmentation using a tourist motivation approach appears to be the most useful method. When the most common characteristics of the segment are revealed, spa destination brands and related companies can fine-tune their marketing strategies to cater more comprehensively to tourist requirements. Several small-scale studies have segmented Japanese tourists by motivation. Segmenting spa tourists by their motivations can improve practical business strategies in spa tourism.

2. Literature review

Many studies have focused on the segmentation of tourists. A review of these studies reveals that they generally take similar perspectives. First, they regard the market as either a priori or a posteriori. As Dolnicar, 2004 mentions, almost all such studies targeting a particular market are a priori studies. The representative study of a posteriori segmentation is Bieger and Laesser, 2002. They segmented tourists in Switzerland according to their motivations. The target of their research was the entire population of Switzerland, thus requiring a posteriori segmentation. Second, these studies characterize motivational factors as either “push” or “pull.” Push factors are the tourists’ own internal forces and pull factors are the external forces exerted by destination attributes. Pull factors are generally tied in with the attractiveness of tourism destinations. In market segmentation by motivation, it is more suitable to use the push motivation factor as a variable. One of the most popular methods of identifying segments is cluster analysis (Shoemaker, 1994, Dolnicar, 2004, Bieger & Laesser, 2002, Jang et. al, 2002, Calantone & Johar, 1984, etc.). Cluster analysis enables the formation of some homogeneous groups (segments) using data that describes pull or push motivation.

Calantone & Johar, 1984 pointed out the importance of “situational benefit segmentation” for the travel market. Through a segmentation analysis of the motivation of tourists who visited Massachusetts, they showed that different factors influenced choice in different seasons. They also implied that travel companies’ marketing programs must recognize the influence of seasonal variations in market needs and incorporate this into their annual plans.

Kamata & Misui, 2013 analyzed the differences in Japanese tourists’ motivations for vacationing in the peak tourist season as well as around the peak. The results showed that a specific segment emerged as the favorite in the peak season. Building on that previous work, we attempt in this study to reveal the characteristics of spa tourists as laid out in Table 1. Our study seeks to explore and further clarify these findings.

Table 1. Future assignments of former study and revise in this study.

	Kamata & Misui, 2013	This study
Tourist motivation	7 push motivation (Bieger & Laesser, 2002)	54 motivations for spa tourists
Travel type	All tourists during April and May in 2012	spa tourists
The purpose of study	The differences in Japanese tourist motivation for vacationing at the ‘peak’ and ‘around the peak.’	To derive segments by spa tourists motivations on weekends and weekdays

3. Analysis

3.1. Hypothesis

Our hypotheses are based on the following assumptions. First, tourists’ motivations will vary on weekends as opposed to weekdays, and the markets must be differentiated accordingly. Furthermore, prices (transportation,

accommodation etc.) during weekdays are generally lower than they are on weekends. However, it is difficult to travel on weekdays, for employees in particular, which means the time constraint is severe. Under such conditions, we developed the following hypotheses: 1) Weekday tourists have clearer motivations than do weekend tourists. 2) Weekday tourists tend to favor nearer spa destinations. 3) Weekday tourists are mainly females.

Based on the above hypotheses, we conducted a factor-cluster analysis to delineate the motivations of spa tourists on weekends and weekdays.

3.2. Data

We conducted a web-based survey to collect data on the motivations of spa tourists. The target group consisted of adults between the ages of 30 and 60 who reside in Tokyo and who had an overnight trip to a spa in the fall of 2013.

We considered 54 items for the motivation of spa tourists based on research on domestic travel motivation conducted by the Japanese tourism research company, Jalan Research Center, 2007.

Respondents were queried on the degree of expectation for each of the 54 items before travel. Their answers were on a 4-point scale: 1 = no expectation, 2 = a very low degree of expectation, 3 = a low degree of expectation, 4 = a high degree of expectation.

In addition to travel motivation factors, we also asked for the travel profile and the demographic profile. As mentioned above, these variables were then employed to characterize the segments formed by cluster analysis. Tourist travel profiles were based on destination, reason for travel, number of members, payment amounts (for transport, accommodation, food, and souvenirs), main transportation mode, and whether or not they posted something about the travel experience on Social Networking Service (SNS). Demographic profiles were based on gender, age, number of family members, education, occupation, and annual income.

Through this survey, we collected motivation data from 525 respondents. This data was separated into weekend and weekday samples. In this study, weekend tourists were defined as those who had an overnight trip on Friday or Saturday. The sample sizes of weekend visitors and weekday visitors were 314 and 211, respectively.

3.3. Factor-cluster analysis

This study employs factor analysis and cluster analysis. Factor analysis is used to derive the underlying construct of benefit dimensions. Cluster analysis is one of the most popular methods of identifying segments. It enables the identification of some homogeneous groups (segments) using data that describes pull or push motivation. This combination of factor and cluster analysis has been adopted in many tourist segmentation studies (Calantone & Johar, 1984, Shoemaker, 1994, Cha et. al, 1995, Dolnicar, 2004, Jang et. al, 2002, etc.).

We have used 54 push motivation items to analyze each factor for weekends and weekdays, using the maximum likelihood method with a promax rotation procedure to derive some of the motivation factors. The eigenvalue of each factor was greater than one, and only those items where the factor loading was greater than 0.4 have been used for each factor. Cronbach's alpha was applied to test the reliability of each factor so that only factors with alphas of greater than 0.6 could be employed. In the second step, we derived each tourist motivation factor for weekends and weekdays from 54 motivation items and then clarified each motivation factor for spa tourism.

The cluster analysis was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the factor scores of each respondent were used to segment spa tourists into homogeneous groups. Next, socio-demographic and travel profiles in each cluster were developed and compared using a chi-square test to find statistical differences among the clusters. This analysis of weekends and weekdays clarified the number of segments and their characteristics.

4. Results

4.1. Weekend tourists

The sample size of weekend tourists was 314. The 54 push motivation items were factor-analyzed. Eventually, 45 push motivation items were analyzed and seven factors were derived with eigenvalues of greater than one. The total variance accounted for was 54.2%. The summary of the factor analysis results is shown in Table 2.

We named and categorized the factors based on the items constituting each factor. 1) Uniqueness: These 11 items included things you can find only at that hot springs, each describing something unique to the area. 2) Soothing Qualities: These 9 items included those characteristics of spa holidays that allow tourists to slow down and relax. 3) Release from Routine: These 7 items included those that enabled or encouraged tourists to escape from their regular routines. 4) Romance: These 5 items were included based on the tendency to use holidays for the purpose of pursuing or furthering romantic relationships. 5) Sports: These 5 items were based on the sports options available at spa destinations. 6) Friendship: These 6 items included those that enabled the deepening of relationships with friends. Two items, “to spend time with family” and “to experience common events with family,” revealed inverse effects. Except for these two items, all the others pertained to relationships with friends and acquaintances. 7) Pets: Two items pertained to close relationships with pets. Traveling with pets is a new trend in Japan.

Table 2. Factor analysis of push motivation items of weekend tourists.

Factors	load- ing	Eigen- value	V.E. * (%)	R.A. *
Uniqueness		13.3	24.7	0.91
visiting a place considered to be famous	0.97			
encountering a place where you are unfamiliar with the local lifestyle, culture, and history	0.88			
having famous sightseeing spots near the hot springs where you're staying	0.79			
having a taste of the world-view of a locality or site	0.78			
seeing and experiencing something found only at that place	0.75			
visiting a place that has recently been in the news or showcased on television	0.75			
encountering and experiencing a traditional event or practice	0.72			
encountering nature as the seasons change, and seasonal events	0.56			
staying at an inn with a history	0.52			
visiting sites invested with special memories	0.49			
staying at a gorgeous inn	0.43			
Soothing Qualities		5.77	10.7	0.88
thinking of nothing, and being at mental ease	0.82			
removing the fatigue of the daily grind	0.80			
spending time at your own pace and rhythm	0.74			
entering the hot springs for a bath multiple times	0.68			
removing yourself from your own residence, to experience a change of atmosphere	0.64			
restoring your good health	0.62			
bathing in a hot springs that has superior qualities for health	0.62			
eating delicious foods, and drinking delicious sake and other beverages	0.47			
taking a bath in a large-sized hot springs	0.47			
Release from Routine		3.43	6.4	0.92
not having to go to work	0.92			
no messages coming from your workplace	0.87			
settling in without thinking about work or study	0.83			
settling in without thinking anything about household chores	0.75			
no need to do your own cooking or housework	0.72			
spending time without having to think about the next day's agenda	0.64			
being able to go to a place where there is nothing you must do	0.61			
Romance		2.46	4.6	0.90
being able to have a special date with your boyfriend, girlfriend, or spouse	0.91			
the fact that the trip, etc., becomes a present for your boyfriend, girlfriend, or spouse	0.81			
being able to be freely flirtatious with your boyfriend, girlfriend, or spouse	0.78			
the fact that you can spend time together with that special someone	0.76			
the fact that your boyfriend, girlfriend, or spouse will feel admiration and love for you	0.62			
Sports		1.49	2.8	0.82
you can enjoy seasonal sports	0.91			

you can do sports or attend events as a group	0.72			
you can enjoy mountain climbing or hiking	0.68			
having and savoring interactions with unknown persons during your trip	0.51			
being able to travel or experience something according to a theme you've determined yourself	0.42			
Friendship		1.52	2.8	0.63
being able to spend time with friends	0.83			
experiencing events together with your friends	0.78			
being able to spend time with acquaintances	0.63			
being able to spend time with your family	-0.52			
experiencing events together with your acquaintances	0.47			
experiencing events together with your family	-0.45			
Pets		1.25	2.3	0.95
being able to spend time with your pets	0.90			
experiencing events together with your pets	0.85			
Total variance explained			54.2	

Note: V.E. means Variance Explained. R.A. means Reliability Alpha.

We conducted cluster analysis (k-means) to segment the sample into 3-7 clusters according to respondent factor scores. After comparing the results of these 3-7 clusters, we employed three clusters where statistical conditions were significant. Table 3 shows the results of the cluster analysis. The motivation factors that received the highest ratings among the three clusters were for the Soothing, Release, and Pets categories. Each cluster was named according to the motivation factors within that cluster that received the highest ratings.

Table 3. Results of cluster analysis: weekend tourists.

Factor	Cluster (number of respondents/share)			F-ratio	S.L.
	1 Active and positive spa tourists n = 33 10.5%	2 Spa tourists who treasure time with family and relatives n=145 46.2%	3 Spa tourists without definite purpose n=136 43.3%		
Uniqueness	3.02	2.51	1.72	94.42	0.00
Soothing Quality	3.28	3.41	2.54	125.34	0.00
Release from Routine	3.39	3.32	2.13	127.04	0.00
Romance	3.09	1.89	1.23	111.54	0.00
Sports	3.00	1.70	1.44	92.69	0.00
Friendship	3.26	1.89	1.68	38.69	0.00
Pets	3.14	1.03	1.01	807.01	0.00

The results were also characterized by demographic variables and travel profile variables and compared using a chi-square test to find statistical differences among the clusters. The summary of each cluster is as follows:

Cluster 1 (10.5%): We named this cluster “Active and positive spa tourists,” referring to tourists who had expectations pertaining to all seven factors. These were mainly high-income male tourists aged 30–39. The party numbers were small, and the members consisted mainly of either children or couples. These respondents made all their travel arrangements personally and paid relatively high prices for the entire trip except for souvenirs. Respondents were positive about wanting to travel and to post about their experiences on SNS.

Cluster 2 (46.2%): We named this cluster “Spa tourists who treasure time with family and relatives,” since tourists in this cluster chose the spa as a destination to enjoy a relaxing time with family and relatives. The important factors here were the Soothing and Release factors. Members of these parties consisted mainly of parents, spouses, and relatives. Self-employed people made up a relatively large share of these people. They also paid relatively high prices for accommodation.

Cluster 3 (43.3%): We named this cluster “Spa tourists without definite purpose,” since tourists in this cluster went on the spa trip without any definite purpose; that is, none of the factors was of particular importance to them. As shown in Table 5, “member of party decided” had a relatively high share among reasons for choosing a particular spa. These tourists were mainly aged 60–69. Because they had no strong reason for choosing the spa, they also expected nothing in particular from the spa experience.

4.2. Weekday tourists

The sample size of weekday tourists was 211. Factor analysis was conducted as we did with weekend tourists. Eventually, 47 push motivation items were analyzed and eight factors were derived with eigenvalues of greater than one. The total variance accounted for was 56.2%. The summary of factor analysis results is shown in Table 4.

We named and categorized the factors based on the items constituting each factor as follows: 1) Soothing Qualities in nearby spas: These 9 items included those characteristics of the spa that allow tourists to slow down and relax. Compared to the factor “Soothing Qualities” on weekends, this factor includes “those you can get to more quickly.” It probably means that weekday tourists seek soothing qualities in nearby spas. 2) Uniqueness: These 11 items included things you can find only at those hot springs, each describing something unique to the area. 3) Activity: These 7 items were based on the sports options or events available at spa destinations. It can be considered important that these activities were done with other members of the party, such as family or pets. 4) Romance: These 5 items were included based on the tendency to use holidays for the purpose of pursuing or furthering romantic relationships. 5) Friendship: These 5 items included those that enabled the deepening of relationships with friends. One item, “to spend time with family” revealed inverse effects. Except for this item, all the others pertained to relationships with friends and acquaintances. 6) Release from work: These 4 items included those that enabled or encouraged tourists to escape from their work. 7) Accommodation preference: These 4 items included the characteristics of the accommodation. 8) Release from house chore: Two items included those that enabled or encouraged tourists to escape from their house chores.

Table 4. Factor analysis of push motivation items of weekday tourists.

Factors	load- ing	Eigen- value	V.E.* (%)	R.A. *
Soothing Qualities in nearby spas		9.12	19.4	0.86
removing the fatigue of the daily grind	0.84			
removing yourself from your own residence, to experience a change of atmosphere	0.84			
thinking of nothing, and being at mental ease	0.81			
bathing in a hot springs that has superior qualities for health	0.58			
spending time at your own pace and rhythm	0.58			
those you can get to more quickly	0.44			
eating delicious foods, and drinking delicious sake and other beverages	0.44			
restoring your good health	0.43			
entering the hot springs for a bath multiple times	0.42			
Uniqueness		5.05	10.7	0.88
visiting a place considered to be famous	0.91			
seeing and experiencing something found only at that place	0.75			
having a taste of the world-view of a locality or site	0.73			
encountering a place where you are unfamiliar with the local lifestyle, culture, and history	0.73			
having famous sightseeing spots near the hot springs where you're staying	0.69			
visiting a place that has recently been in the news or showcased on television	0.64			
encountering and experiencing a traditional event or practice	0.52			
having and savoring interactions with unknown persons during your trip	0.46			
visiting sites invested with special memories	0.44			
tasting, enjoying, using local specialties, goods, and crafts at the local site itself	0.43			
encountering nature as the seasons change, and seasonal events	0.41			
Activity		3.46	7.4	0.80
you can do sports or attend events as a group	0.84			
you can enjoy mountain climbing or hiking	0.75			
you can enjoy seasonal sports	0.74			
being able to travel or experience something according to a theme you've determined yourself	0.63			
experiencing events together with your family	0.53			
being able to spend time with your pets	0.50			
experiencing events together with your pets	0.43			
Romance		2.88	6.1	0.89
being able to have a special date with your boyfriend, girlfriend, or spouse	0.97			
being able to be freely flirtatious with your boyfriend, girlfriend, or spouse	0.95			
the fact that the trip, etc., becomes a present for your boyfriend, girlfriend, or spouse	0.73			
the fact that your boyfriend, girlfriend, or spouse will feel admiration and love for you	0.64			
the fact that you can spend time together with that special someone	0.58			
Friendship		2.14	4.6	0.59

being able to spend time with friends	0.80			
experiencing events together with your friends	0.80			
being able to spend time with acquaintances	0.70			
experiencing events together with your acquaintances	0.53			
being able to spend time with your family	-0.53			
Release from works		1.06	2.3	0.91
not having to go to work	0.91			
no messages coming from your workplace	0.85			
settling in without thinking about work or study	0.84			
being able to go to a place where there is nothing you must do	0.43			
Accommodation preference		1.44	3.	0.81
staying at a gorgeous inn	0.88			
staying at an elegant inn	0.77			
staying at an inn with a history	0.64			
staying in an inn where each room has its own outdoor hot-springs bath	0.49			
Release from house chore		1.25	2.7	0.91
no need to do your own cooking or housework	0.92			
settling in without thinking anything about household chores	0.68			
Total variance explained			56.2	

Note: V.E. means Variance Explained. R.A. means Reliability Alpha.

As a result of cluster analysis, we employed 4 clusters where statistical conditions were significant (Table 5). The motivation factors that received the highest ratings among the 4 clusters were for the Soothing, Release from house chore, and Activity categories. Each cluster was named according to the motivation factors within that cluster that received the highest ratings.

Table 5. Results of cluster analysis: weekday tourists.

Factors	Cluster (number of respondents/share)				F-ratio	S.L.
	1 Couple spa tourists who seek release and soothing n = 64 30.3%	2 Active and positive spa tourists n=27 12.8%	3 Spa tourists without definite purpose n=46 21.8%	4 Spa tourists who escape from house chore n=74 35.1%		
Soothing Qualities in near spa	3.37	2.95	2.09	2.94	51.24	0.00
Uniqueness	2.59	2.66	1.68	1.88	42.05	0.00
Activity	1.26	2.35	1.23	1.28	67.25	0.00
Romance	1.69	2.74	1.33	1.25	32.95	0.00
Friendship	1.80	2.53	1.63	1.79	7.98	0.00
Release from works	3.41	2.96	1.30	2.28	61.48	0.00
Accommodation preference	2.30	2.59	1.45	1.76	42.76	0.00
Release from house chores	3.55	3.09	1.66	3.04	109.91	0.00

The results were also characterized by demographic variables and travel profile variables and compared using a chi-square test to find statistical differences among the clusters. The summary of each cluster is as follows:

Cluster 1 (30.3%): We named this cluster “Couple spa tourists who seek release and soothing,” since tourists in this cluster seek soothing and release with their spouses. These were mainly female tourists aged 40–49. These respondents paid relatively high prices for meals.

Cluster 2 (12.8%): We named this cluster “Active and positive spa tourists,” referring to tourists who had expectations pertaining to all seven factors. These were mainly male tourists aged 30–49. The members consisted mainly of children, couples, or pets. They paid relatively high prices for transportation, accommodation, and meals. Respondents were positive about wanting to travel and to post about their experiences on SNS.

Cluster 3 (21.8%): We named this cluster “Spa tourists without definite purpose,” since tourists in this cluster went on the spa trip without any definite purpose; that is, none of the factors was of particular importance to them. “Member of party decided” had a relatively high share among reasons for choosing a particular spa. These tourists were mainly aged 50–59.

Cluster 4 (35.1%): We named this cluster “Spa tourists who escape from house chore,” since tourists in this cluster seek soothing and release from house chores. These were mainly female tourists aged 60–69. The members

consisted mainly of parents, siblings, children, and friends. These respondents did not pay relatively high prices for meals. They posted about their experiences on SNS.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study are as follows. First, the most important motivation factor is “soothing quality” for both weekend and weekday tourists. Second, the “active and positive spa tourists” segment and the “spa tourists without definite purpose” segment exist across both the weekend and weekday samples.

We compared the results of the weekend and weekday samples based on the three hypotheses provided above. The first hypothesis is “weekday tourists have clearer motivations than do weekend tourists.” The ratio of “spa tourists without definite purpose” segment is 43.3% in the weekend sample and 21.8% in the weekday sample. From this result, it can be said that weekday tourists have clearer motivations than do weekend tourists.

The second hypothesis is “weekday tourists tend to favor nearer spa destinations.” The factor analysis of the weekday sample derived the motivation factor “soothing qualities in nearby spas,” and this included the motivation, “those you can get to more quickly.” It probably means that weekday tourists seek soothing qualities in nearby spas, which supports the second hypothesis.

The third hypothesis is “weekday tourists are mainly females.” As shown in the results of the weekday tourist segmentation, Cluster 1 and Cluster 4 consisted mainly of female tourists: the share of these clusters is over 65%. Moreover, among the tourists in Cluster 4, one of the reasons for choosing the spa was “economical plan of accommodation,” which seems to reflect the fact that spa prices are lower on weekdays.

6. Conclusions

Our results support the following suggestions to spa operators or spa tourism related companies. They should distinguish between the weekend and weekday tourist markets in their promotional strategies. For an example in advertisements, they might use the term “soothing quality” in copy targeting both weekend and weekday visitors. The areas should be advertised and communicated reinforcing the place brand (Kavoura, 2014) taking into consideration the distance from other cities which is also the suggestion for other forms of tourism (Bitsani and Kavoura, 2012). For weekend tourists, “release from routine” is an important factor to consider in advertising. Regarding the weekday market, spa operators or spa tourism related companies should target specific segments, especially “couple spa tourists who seek release and soothing” or “spa tourists who escape from house chore.” As for “couple spa tourists who seek release and soothing,” “release from works” and “release from house chore” are important factors. For the segment “spa tourists who escape from house chore,” the important factor is “release from house chore.” Furthermore, economical accommodations should be targeted at tourists in this segment.

In future work, we will focus on a specific spa and derive segments by tourist motivation. Moreover, we will focus on spa tourists in other seasons and derive the different characteristics of the segments. Finally, when our study is read in conjunction with the work of Misui & Kamata, 2013, spa operators will be able to consider both where their tourists come from and what motivates them to visit spas.

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